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The Kampong

"The Kampong", a Malay or Javanese word for a cluster of houses, a settlement or a village, was applied by Dr. David Fairchild to his new home in Florida in 1916. The property is almost 10 acres in extent, bordered on the west by Douglas Road and on the east by Biscayne Bay. It is located approximately one mile from the center of Coconut Grove. On this property, Dr. Fairchild (while Chief of the Seed and Plant Introduction Section of the U.S. Department of Agriculture) introduced and grew many tropical plants which he collected during his plant explorations.

HISTORY

The first settler to live here was Jolly Jack Peacock, who sold his claim for $50.00 to Mr. J. W. Ewan, known as the "Duke of Dade", who received the homestead grant in 1883. Captain and Mrs. A. R. Simmons acquired the land in 1892 and constructed a barn of oolitic limestone, a native rock similar to coral. This was later used by Dr. Fairchild as a study, where he wrote all of his post-1916 books. The World Grows Round My Door concerns The Kampong. His other books include The Book of Monsters, Exploring for Plants, The World Was My Garden, and Garden Islands of the Great East. The "Lab", as it was and still is referred to, is one of the oldest buildings in South Florida.

Mrs. Simmons was better known as Dr. Galt Simmons, the only medical doctor between Key West and Miami, and was renowned for her medical assistance to the Seminole Indians and early settlers. A brass nameplate on the door of the original cottage still indicates the Simmons homestead.

The Fairchilds acquired the property in 1916 and lived here until the death of Marian Fairchild in 1962. Dr. Fairchild predeceased his wife by eight years. The future of this historic site was uncertain until it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cleaveland Sweeney in 1963. Mr. Sweeney was a prominent attorney in Washington, D. C., a world traveler and, at the time of his death in 1967, President of the Explorer's Club.

ARCHITECTURE

The main house was designed in 1928 by architect Edward Clarence Dean, who had also designed the Fairchilds' Bethesda, Maryland, home - "In the Woods". After the Sweeneys purchased The Kampong, the residence was extended and redecorated by architect Mary Elizabeth Droste.

DR. FAIRCHILD AND THE KAMPONG

Throughout all of Dr. Fairchild's travels and experimentation, he planted many exotic plant specimens at The Kampong, as well as at the USDA's Introduction Station at Chapman Field. Many duplicate experiments and plants "grew round his door", as he loved to be surrounded by unusual foliage - reminders of his global travels. He often experimented with plants at The Kampong before taking them to the USDA. Some of his experiments remain unique to The Kampong.

FAMOUS VISITORS

Many famous people, as well as noted horticulturists, have visited The Kampong over the years. They include Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Alexander Graham Bell (Dr. Fairchild's father-in-law), Elmer D. Merrill, Barbour Lothrop, Wilson Popenoe and, in the Sweeneys' time, Richard Leakey, Thomas Hoving of the Metropolitcan Museum of Art and Dr. Donald Johanson, discoverer of the famous "Lucy" skeleton.

When visiting his daughter and son-in-law, Dr. Alexander Graham Bell stayed in the old guava jelly factory, which was turned into a guest house but later destroyed in a hurricane. While at The Kampong, Bell invented a simple method of extracting distilled water from sea water using solar energy. This device remains intact, in his original location.

DR. CATHERINE HAUBERG SWEENEY

Catherine Hauberg Sweeney was born in Rock Island, Illinois. She received a B.S. degree in Zoology from the University of Illinois, and did post-graduate work in Botany and Zoology at the University of Arizona and the University of Illinois. An Honorary Doctorate was conferred upon Mrs. Sweeney by Wilson College in 1976, for her work in Botany and Horticulture. She also received the Silver Medal from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1977.

Mrs. Sweeney is also a Member-at-Large of the Garden Club of America, member of the Rare Fruit Council International, Palm Society, American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (and, for a short while, one of its Trustees) and Society of Women Geographers. She is a member of the Visiting Committee of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, and is on the board of the World Wildlife Fund, Fairchild Tropical Garden, and Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden.

Mrs. Sweeney publishes a quarterly, The Kampong Notes, which is distributed to many libraries and botanical institutions around the world. She maintains the property as a private fruit orchard, to further work in horticulture and to provide a valuable germ plasm resource.

HORTICULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The rare and unusual tropical trees growing at The Kampong today could well comprise a text in tropical botany. Prior to Dr. Fairchild's purchase of The Kampong, some exotic plants, specifically the giant prized royal palms, were already "in residence". Most of the plants were introduced by Dr. Fairchild, and show the evolution of many unique and valuable plants to this country. The collection continues to be expanded and diversified by Mrs. Sweeney. Plants at The Kampong do not merely duplicate specimens found elsewhere. They often have a distinctive history and identity.

EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

The Kampong currently plays a direct as well as indirect role in education, since it hosts a number of educational groups. Prominent among these is a graduate-level summer course, "Plants of the Tropics", taught through the auspices of the Harvard Summer School. This has been conducted for ten consecutive years. A similar course has been instituted by the University of Florida. Hope College, Michigan, also conducted summer courses here a few years ago. The particular value of these courses is that they enable students to conveniently examine a considerable diversity of cultivated (and some native) tropical plants without the requirement of extended and expensive travel and field work. These courses bridge the gap between formal academic offerings at the respective university and direct exposure to tropical vegetation. A number of students who have visited The Kampong over the years are beginning to make their mark in the academic world.

Local garden clubs, students and other horticulturally-oriented groups in the South Florida area visit The Kampong frequently. The Kampong remains a living monument to the often little-appreciated achievements of its primary architects - Dr. David Fairchild and Dr. Catherine Sweeney.

"WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE KAMPONG?" (The World Grows Round My Door, Chap. 26)

When Dr. Fairchild was asked this question, he replied:

> "Together we have seen a great many gardens in various parts of the world. We have seen them come into existence and later fade away. We have visited the stone monuments of Egypt and other works of human hands designed to be permanent reminders of personalities that were once living beings, only to find them falling into decay, slowly crumbling to dust.
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> "I like to think that The Kampong has had a part in encouraging others to find enjoyment in playing with plants rather than in pastimes of a different character.
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> "To play only with the plants chance has thrown into our hands, and to think that they must be the best because they are native to the country, never appealed to me. My long hunt for other plants to grow has furnished me with no end of amusement and employment, and some of them have turned out well.
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> "However, there is a deeper reason, deeper than that lying on the surface, why I have found such a profound satisfaction in a life with plants. The stuff of which they are made is living material, much like the stuff of which our own bodies is composed. Much of the machinery of heredity was revealed through close observation of the behavior of plants by Mendel in his monastery garden in Brunn; by De Vries, the Professor of Amsterdam; and by Blakeslee of Cold Spring Harbor.
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> "From the gardens of other plant lovers may come discoveries of greater importance - for can anyone doubt that a knowledge of the structure of living protoplasm will change man's behavior profoundly? If The Kampong has kept rare species to supply plant breeders with material for their experiments, who shall say that this fact alone has not made it worthwhile?
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> "I would like to think that some of my trees would be kept long enough so that plant breeders might wander about in the early mornings getting pollen for their studies, perhaps making hybrids with new flavors after I am gone."

Mrs. Sweeney has gifted this property to the Pacific Tropical Garden in Kauai, Hawaii, but has retained a life estate of The Kampong.

Larry Schokman
July 1985

In addition to the following list of plants which produce edible parts, there are many ornamental and timber trees of commercial significance.

Abiu
Akee
Allspice
Almirajo
Antidesma

Anona
  -Atemoya (hybrid)
  -Custard Apple (*Reticulata*)
  -Illama (*Diversifolia*)
  -Mountain Soursop (Fairchildiana)
  -Mountain Soursop (*Montana*)
  -Soursop (*Muricata*)
  -Sweetsop

Ambarella
Avocado - 40 varieties

Bael Fruit
Banisteropsis
Baobab
Barbados Cherry
Bay Rum
Betel Leaf
Bilimbi
Bixa
Black Cherry (Ecuador)
Blackberry Jam Fruit
Blood Orange
Bonette (*Jarilla*)
Brazos, Blackberry
Buddha's Fist - Citron
Bunchosia

Caimito
Calabash
Canistel
Cannonball
Carambola
Carob
Cas
Cashew
Citrus - 56 varieties
Cinnamon
Citronella Grass
Clove
Coca (erythroxylon)
Coconut
Cocoplum
Coffee
Corozo (*Aiphanes*)
Cotopriz
Curry Leaf

Datura (Brugmansia)
Dovyalis
Dubell Plum
Durio

Ebony

Eugenia
  -Cherry of the River Grande
  -Grumichama
  -Pitomba
  -Manaus Plum
  -Stipulata
  -Surinam Cherry

Figs
Ficus pseudopalma

Garcinia
  -Imbe
  -Cambodge
  -Charichuela
  -Madrono

Gnetum
Governors Plum
Guava
Guajilote
Gustavia (Sachamango)

Herbert River Cherry
Herrenia Sp.
Hog Plum

Ice Cream Bean
Imbe
Inchi
Indian Almond
Indian Jujube

Jak Fruit
Jambolan
Jelly Palm (*Syagrus*)

Keppel
Key Lime
Kola Nut
Kwai Muk

Langsat
Lemon Grass
Licania Platypus
Lignum Vitae
Lingaro
Longan
Loquat
Lovi-Lovi
Lucma
Lychee

Mabolo
Macadamia
Malay Apple
Mamey Apple
Manaus Plum (Pseudanamomis)
Mango - 51 varieties
Miracle Fruit

Mombin
  -Purple
  -Yellow

Monstera (Ceriman)
Mulberry
Muntingia

Myrciaria
  -Jaboticaba
  -Rum Berry
  -Vexator

Mysore Raspberry

Nance
Nutmeg

Okari Nut
Olosapo
Otaheite Gooseberry

Pachira
Pandanus
Papaya
Paradise Nut
Parmentiera
Passion Fruit
Peach
Peach Palm
Pear

Persimmon (Diospyros)
  -Mexican (Digyna)
  -Japanese (Kaki)
  -Philippines (Mabolo)
  -American (Virginiana)

Pili Nut
Pineapple
Pitaya
Pomello

Rambutan
Ritchia Reflexa
Rollinia

Santol (Manilla)
Sapodilla

Sapote (Pouteria)
  -Green (Viride)
  -Mamey (Colorado)

Sapote (Quararibea)
  -South American (Q. Cordata)
  -Oxaca, Mex: (Q. Funebris)

Sapote (Casimiroa)
  -White (Tetrameria)
  -White (Edulis)

Sausage
Seagrap
Spanish Lime
Star Apple
Strychnos*
Sunsapote

Syzygium
  -Gowok
  -Rose Apple
  -Sea Apple
  -Malay Apple

Tahiti Lime
Tangelo
Tamarind
Terminalia
Triplaris
Tree Tomato

Vanilla
Velvet Tamarind

Wampi
Woodapple

***Poisonous**